



Department
for Education

Research priorities and questions

**Pupil Premium: raising achievement of
disadvantaged pupils**

March 2014

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General approach to research needs and priorities

This paper is one of a series of 15 which aims to:

- promote the importance of robust quantitative evidence, in combination with other methods, to increase understanding of ‘what works’ in education and children’s services;
- identify evidence gaps and promote discussion of them with the research community, practitioners and other stakeholders;
- initiate collaboration with the research community, practitioners and other stakeholders to research these issues; and,
- support work that helps understand and tackle the barriers to evidence based practice, including how to make evidence accessible to practitioners.

The principles behind the department’s research strategy are inspired by Ben Goldacre’s vision¹ in the Department for Education Analytical Review². In future, the development and use of evidence should be increasingly driven and owned by the research community, sector bodies and practitioners.

The published suite of priority and question papers between them cover the department’s key areas of work and provides a coherent strategic context for the research community, sector bodies and practitioners as well as the department, to plan and prioritise research. The department will continue to commission research, informed by the published priority questions

Views about the research questions and priority papers, recent findings, on-going research or evidence gaps are warmly welcomed. We will also be arranging a series of discussions throughout 2014 with practitioners, the research community and other stakeholders to discuss views and help shape departmental plans to filling evidence gaps. If you want to be involved please email us at: Research.PRIORITIES@education.gsi.gov.uk, follow us on Twitter (@educationgovuk) or like us on Facebook (www.facebook.com/educationgovuk).

¹ Goldacre, B.(2013), [Building Evidence into Education](#)

² The Department for Education (2013), [Analytical Review: The Department](#)

Pupil Premium: the policy context

Evidence shows that economically disadvantaged pupils perform less well on average than non-disadvantaged pupils, at all levels of school education; furthermore, economically disadvantaged pupils are also associated with slower progress compared to their peers with the same level of attainment.³

The department has been implementing the Pupil Premium to address these underlying inequalities, by ensuring that funding to tackle disadvantage reaches the pupils who need it most and schools are held to account for the achievement of their disadvantaged pupils. The Pupil Premium was introduced in April 2011 and is additional funding⁴ for schools **to use to raise the attainment of disadvantaged pupils** and to close the gap with their peers, while changes to school accountability were introduced in September 2013. Disadvantaged pupils are currently defined as those who have been registered for Free School Meals (FSM) at any point in the past six years and children looked after for six months or more.

Funding has been protected in the face of financial pressures; current funding for 2013-14 is £1.875bn, equivalent to £900 per pupil, with primary-aged pupils attracting an additional £53. This will rise to £2.5bn in 2014-15, with £1,350 per primary-aged pupil, £935 per secondary-aged pupil and £1,900 per looked-after child. In addition, from April 2014, the £1,900 rate will be extended to pupils who are looked after for one day or more, and those who are adopted from care or leave care under a special guardianship or residence order. Schools have the autonomy to decide how best to use the additional resources, while also being held to account through Ofsted inspections on the impact of this spending, and through the performance tables on the education outcomes of disadvantaged pupils.

The department supports the identification and sharing of **evidence-based good practice on the spending decisions** relating to the Pupil Premium, along with our priority 'to work together with teachers to promote the creation, dissemination and – most importantly of all – the effective use of high-quality evidence about effective approaches to pedagogy and classroom practice'⁵ (p.6).

Evidence-based good practice is supported through the substantial research programme delivered by the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF). Funded by the department for

³ Please see, for example, [Department for Education: GCSE and Equivalent Attainment by Pupil Characteristics in England, 2011/2012 summary table](#)

⁴ For more information on general school funding, please see the DfE Research Priorities and Questions: School Funding available from the [research priorities pages](#) on gov.uk website.

⁵ For further information on evidence-based good practice, please see the published [DfE Research Priorities and Questions: Teachers and Teaching, 2013](#),

a fifteen year programme, the EEF evidence base will continue to grow through evaluation of innovative approaches to tackling educational disadvantage.

The EEF has developed an evaluation framework to ensure all projects are subject to a quantitative impact evaluation to estimate the effect on pupil's attainment⁶. For example:

- A Randomised Controlled Trial (RCT) evaluating the effectiveness of a primary school based intervention Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS);
- An RCT of a training programme for primary school teachers in Lesson Study, a process of improving teaching practice;
- An RCT examining the impact of teaching chess to primary aged pupils;
- An RCT to examine the impact of two initiatives, 'mathematics and reasoning' and 'literacy and morphemes'; and,
- An RCT to test the effectiveness of the latest Let's Think Secondary Science (LTSS) programme⁷.

Projects feed into the developing evidence base and the Teaching and Learning Toolkit⁸, produced by the EEF and the Sutton Trust. The Toolkit provides evidence to inform decision-making in schools.

⁶ Please see the [EEF Evaluation Resources](#)

⁷ Please see the [Education Endowment Foundation Projects](#)

⁸ Please see the [Education Endowment Foundation Toolkit](#)

Research summary and gaps

The available evidence⁹ on schools' approaches to allocating Pupil Premium funding indicates that schools tend to apply a wider definition of disadvantage than only eligibility for FSM and looked after children. This means a significant proportion of schools spend the Pupil Premium more widely. Thus, primarily the department needs to **understand and influence schools' decision making processes to encourage schools to use the funding efficiently and effectively.**

Evidence indicates that many schools have been able to introduce new interventions or enhance their existing interventions for disadvantaged pupils by using the Pupil Premium.¹⁰ Evidence also shows that schools' use of the premium is inconsistent and often fails to take into account **evidence on effectiveness and the impact on attainment.** For example, Ofsted's 2012¹¹ and 2013¹² reports found that employing additional teaching assistants is one of the most popular choices schools make for spending the Pupil Premium on, yet the effectiveness of teaching assistants on attainment has been questioned by Higgins et al. (2011) in their Toolkit of Strategies to Improve Learning¹³. The most common resource is the school's own experience of what works, followed by using evidence from other schools and academic research.

Research¹⁴ indicates that schools and local authorities continue to make efforts to encourage families to register for FSM since the introduction of the Pupil Premium. However, under-registration still occurs: 14 per cent of pupils in 2012¹⁵ and 11 per cent of pupils in 2013¹⁶ were found to be eligible for FSM but not claiming them. **How best to encourage parents to declare their socio-economic circumstances, such as for FSM registration, is an area to be researched further.**

⁹ Carpenter. H., Papps. I., Bragg. J., Dyson. A., Harris. D., Kerr. K., Todd. L., & Laing. K (2013) [Evaluation of Pupil Premium: Research Report](#). TNS BMRB, TECIS, Centre for Equity in Education, University of Manchester & Newcastle University.

¹⁰ See reference 9, Carpenter et al (2013)

¹¹ Ofsted (2012) [The Pupil Premium. How schools are using the Pupil Premium funding to raise achievement for disadvantaged pupils.](#)

¹² Ofsted (2013) [The Pupil Premium: how schools are spending the funding successfully to maximise achievement](#)

¹³ Higgins. S., Kokotsaki. D., & Coe. R (2011) [Toolkit of Strategies to Improve Learning](#). The Sutton Trust, CEM Centre & Durham University.

¹⁴ See reference 9, Carpenter et al (2013)

¹⁵ Iniesta-Martinez & Evans (2012) [Pupils Not Claiming Free School Meals](#), DfE.

¹⁶ Lord, Easby & Evans (2013) [Pupils Not Claiming Free School Meals – 2013](#), DfE.

Future priorities

The research questions identified below are intended as broad prompts; they have been formulated to help identify where further analytical and evaluative work might most usefully be focused - whether that work is undertaken by Government, by independent researchers, or indeed by schools themselves. The department also needs to understand how these issues vary across the full diversity of England's school system. **These questions are intended to be reviewed at regular intervals, as gaps are addressed and new areas for investigations arise.**

Making decisions about spending the Pupil Premium

- How do schools decide what to spend the Pupil Premium on, what to prioritise on, and who is involved in this decision making process?
- How do schools make decisions based on cost effectiveness for spending the Pupil Premium?
- How can schools assess and improve the quality of implementation of the uses they make of the Pupil Premium?
- How can we measure changes in the quality of implementation of the uses schools make of the Pupil Premium nationally?
- What is the most effective way of communicating information to schools about the use of the Pupil Premium that will have the greatest impact on the decisions schools make?

The impact of the Pupil Premium

- How do schools measure the impact of the Pupil Premium on different types of pupils and how do the benefits of the Pupil Premium vary? Why do ethnic minority pupils who are eligible for FSM have higher attainment than white pupils who are eligible for FSM?
- How can we assess the impact of the Pupil Premium on the national attainment gaps at key stages 2 and 4 in the near term, taking into account how recently the Pupil Premium was introduced, and subsequent changes to pupil eligibility? What would early signs of success look like?
- How can we control for other policy changes (e.g. changes in the curriculum) when assessing the impact of the Pupil Premium?
- Are parents/carers and governors holding schools to account for their use of the Pupil Premium and does this have an effect on raising standards amongst disadvantaged pupils?
- In a decentralised system where schools have developed their own monitoring processes, which tools are most commonly and effectively used to track attainment and performance and how?

Pupil Premium funding

- From September 2014, all infant school children will receive FSM - how can eligible parents/carers be encouraged to continue registering their child/ren for FSM, a measure used to allocate Pupil Premium funding?
- Economic modelling of eligibility: how and when would rapid economic recovery impact on numbers of eligible pupils and how would this affect the attainment gap?
- What is the importance of the proportion of overall school funding received as Pupil Premium in how schools use money and is there a tipping point where Pupil Premium exerts particular influence?
- How do schools distribute the Pupil Premium across the school and was this affected by the Ever6 measure?

Pupil Premium rationale

- How are the effects of ethnicity on attainment changing over time, absolutely and relative to Pupil Premium eligibility?
- How are regional (geographic) patterns of attainment interplaying with eligibility for the Pupil Premium in their influence on pupil attainment, and how is this changing over time?
- What softer or hidden factors lie beneath ethnic and regional patterns of attainment for Pupil Premium eligible pupils, and how is this changing over time?
- How do the factors influencing low attainment differ between the early years, primary school and secondary school?

Engaging with future priorities

We would like individuals or organisations to respond to this and you can do this in various ways:

- Share with DfE any existing research evidence or current work relevant to questions. Email to Research.PRIORITIES@education.gsi.gov.uk.
- Prioritise research effort or bids in the light of the evidence questions.
- Debate evidence gaps and priorities with your own associations or other stakeholders. DfE would be interested to hear any views emerging - email as above.
- Follow us and join the discussion on Twitter (@educationgovuk)
- Like us on Facebook (www.facebook.com/educationgovuk)



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